

Planning activities in a new university museum

PENY THEOLOGI-GOUTI*

Resumo

A Universidade de Patras (Grécia) encontra-se a organizar um novo museu de ciência e tecnologia por forma a incrementar os laços entre a Universidade e a cidade de Patras. As palavras 'pedagogia', 'património' e 'identidade' têm sido de importância crucial desde o início do processo de planeamento. Após intenso debate interno, foi formalmente decidido que o novo Museu seria organizado e implementado em acórdância com a definição de 'museu' estabelecida pelo Conselho Internacional dos Museus (ICOM). A preparação do programa do Museu, incluindo as linhas gerais do projecto arquitectónico e de construção, bem como a recolha e documentação dos objectos teve início em Maio de 1998. O Museu foi oficialmente criado em Setembro de 2001.

Abstract

Patras University is organizing a new Science and Technology Museum in order to facilitate and encourage contacts between the University and the town. From the early planning stages onwards, the words 'Pedagogy, Heritage and Identity' were important in discussions about the role and goals of the Science and Technology Museum. After intensive debate, it was decided that the Museum would be organized in accordance with the International Council of Museums (ICOM) definition of a museum. The Patras University new Science and Technology Museum preparation process started in May 1998, aiming at designing and constructing a new building and creating, enriching and documenting the collections. The Museum was officially founded in September 2001.

Introduction

Patras is located in the north-western part of the Peloponnesus, southern Greece. Patras University is situated just 10 km from the city of Patras on a self-contained campus of about 24,000m². The campus has plenty open space, tree shaded areas and characteristic Mediterranean olive groves. It lies at the foot of Mount Panachaïkos with a view over the Gulf of Corinth unto the mountains of central Greece. The University was founded in 1964 and started functioning in the academic year of 1966-67¹. As all Greek universities it is a self-governing public institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and financed entirely by the state. The University of Patras was the third

university established in Greece and it is now the third largest in the country.

The initial orientation of the University was towards science and technology, with Biology, Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry being the first departments, shortly after followed by Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. Over the years the number of departments has grown to 22 and the academic orientation of the institution has been balanced by the creation of the School of Health Sciences, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the School of Management and Economics. The University acquired its own independent campus a few years later, encompassing the Regional University Teaching Hospital, the

* Penny Theologi-Gouti is Head of the Patras University Science and Technology Museum and Secretary of UMAC. Address: Science and Technology Museum, Patras University, 26110 Rion-Patras, Greece. E-mail: stmuseum@upatras.gr

¹ See <http://www.upatras.gr/>

Central University Library, the Conference and Cultural Centre, a nursery, primary and secondary schools, a bank, a post office, a swimming pool, a gymnasium, and a café-restaurant.

Ever since the beginning, the integration of the university in the local community has been problematic. Although the community recognizes the university to be important for the development of the town of Patras, it is also thought that university professors are peculiar people who work hard, but are unable to engage in local life style and tradition. Consequently, there has been a rift between the university and the local community and the latter is largely unaware of the work and activities within the university compound.

In the early 1990s, being conscious of this gap, the Rector launched a debate on different strategies for the university to become more open towards the town and region. The main objectives were to facilitate and encourage contacts between the university and the town, thus promoting better integration between the two. The Conference and Cultural Centre, the Science and Technology Museum, and the café-restaurant were among the concrete results of this initiative. However, although the Conference and Cultural Centre and the café-restaurant are already open to the public, the Science and Technology Museum is still in a preliminary stage. In this paper I will look at this major ongoing Patras University project, with a focus on recent developments.

The Science and Technology Museum

Patras University is well-known due to important research carried out in its laboratories. However, local society is largely unaware of this research, even if there may be evident interest in it. From the very beginning, the Science and Technology Museum was aimed to become a mirror of university activities, displaying them to the public and familiarizing the public with them. Therefore, the words 'Pedagogy, Heritage and

Identity' – the title of this conference session – played an important role in discussions about the role and goals of the Science and Technology Museum.

The first concern was to establish whether 'the Museum is to focus exclusively on the scientific and technological identity of the University or should it also address the scientific and technological identity of the Patras region'. I should point out that the first schools after the liberation from Turkish occupation in the mid-nineteenth century were established in the Patras areas. Moreover, Patras was one of the very few places where the first engineers, doctors, chemists, etc. worked during this period. Therefore, Patras is one of the richest industrial heritage areas in Greece and no other museum of science and technology exists in the area. At this stage, the word 'heritage' began to be taken into account in the planning discussions: 'should we collect only university heritage or should we expand our collecting policy to the scientific and technological heritage of the area or even Greece as a whole'. Furthermore, as the Museum is an integral part of the university, how could we effectively use the knowledge and experience of professors and researchers and involve them – as well as students – in the Museum planning process and, generally, in the Museum's activities once it has opened its doors? Finally, what kind of public are we targeting? How open will the Museum be to the general public and to school groups?

After intensive debate, it was established that the Museum must acquire, conserve, and research all material evidence of the sciences and technology, with special attention to those taught in the university's departments, in order to exhibit them for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment and in accordance with the International Council of Museums (ICOM) definition of the museum². The Museum's activities will be accessible to as many sectors of society as possible. New technologies of information and communication will be used to make sciences and technology more accessible to the public. The Patras University new

² See the integral definition at <http://icom.museum/definition.html>

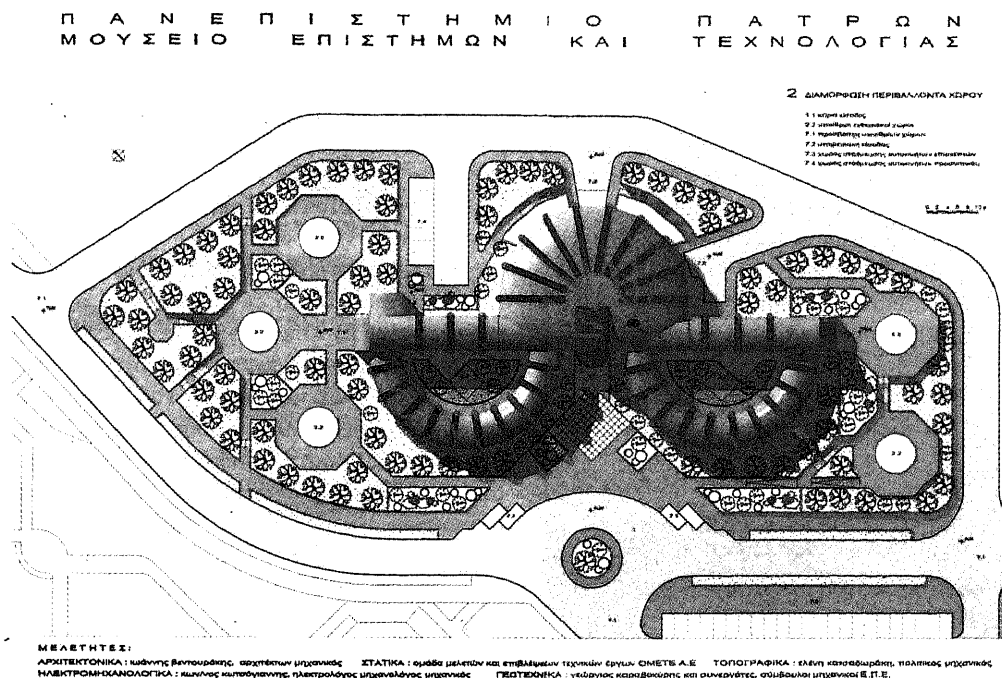


Fig. 1 – Plan of the new Patras University Science and Technology Museum building. Designed by Ioannis Vedourakis-Architect, OMETE Ltd-Statics Study, Constantinos Kotsogiannis-Topographical Study, Heleni Katsadoraki-Electrical and Mechanical Study, George Karavokyris and associate consultants Llc-Geotechnical Study.

Science and Technology Museum preparation process started in May 1998, aiming at designing and constructing a new building and at creating, enriching and documenting the collections. The Museum was officially founded in September 2001³.

The new museum building will cover a surface of 3,500 m², which will be constructed in two or more stages (Figs. 1 and 2). The building can eventually be expanded according to future needs (THEOLOGI-GOUTI 2000). The Museum will be located at the centre of the campus, just opposite the new Conference and Cultural Centre and beside the café-restaurant. This location is strategic because the Conference and Cultural Centre hosts a significant number of conferences, seminars

and cultural events, while the café-restaurant is frequented by university students and staff, as well as school groups and people from the local community. Furthermore, the café frequently organizes social events for different types of audiences. This location within the campus acknowledges the role the Museum can play within the university and the local community alike. Hopefully, the construction of the first part of the building will start in Summer 2003 and will be funded by the 3rd European Community Support Framework (75% of the budget will be funded by the European Fund for Regional Development and 25% by the Greek Government). The university is still looking for funds to build the other part of the new Museum.

³ Presidential Decree N.290, *Journal of the Greek Democracy*, First Issue, N.199, 12 September 2001.

The Museum was founded as an independent activity of Patras University under the School of Exact Sciences. A Scientific Director has the full responsibility of the Museum. He is a member of the Teaching and Research Staff of the School of Exact Sciences, elected every three years by the General Assembly. The Director elected in 2002 for this triennial is the Professor of the Department of Biology, Vassilios Marmaras. The Director has created a Scientific Committee, composed by a member of the Teaching and Research Staff of each Department of the School of Exact Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Geology, Material Science, Mathematics and Physics) in order to decide on the aims of the Museum and the strategies to achieve them.

The Head of the Museum belongs to the permanent staff of the university and is responsible for organizing the Museum, enriching the collections, etc., and

collaborating with the Director in decision-making. In the spring of 2003, a new staff-member will join the museum team to take care of the documentation and conservation of the collections.

We hope that in the near future the museum will at least have a collection department, a documentation department, an exhibitions department and a department for educational programmes and other activities, in order to be able to fulfil its academic and public role. At that stage we intend to enrich the museum team with four different categories of staff: specialized staff which will run scientific activities such as collection, documentation, exhibition, educational programmes etc. in collaboration with the university departments, administrative personnel to support all administrative matters, supporting personnel (cloakroom, information desk), and personnel for vigilance.

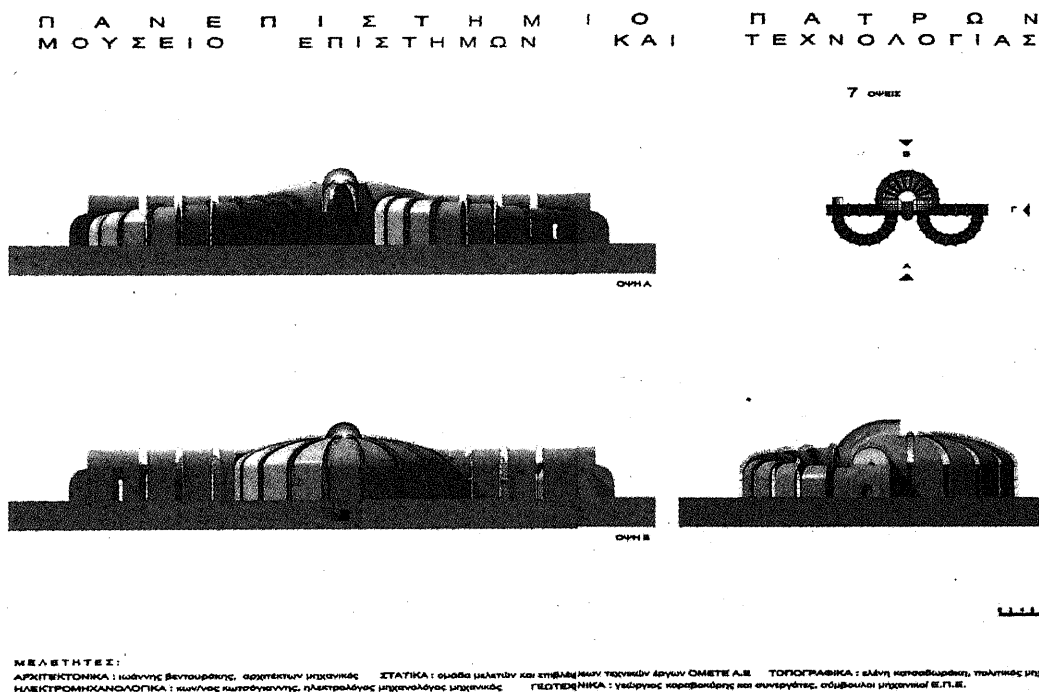


Fig. 2 – Different views of the new Patras University Science and Technology Museum building.

The Museum operates in collaboration with the participating University Departments. As far as collections are concerned, many university departments, sections or laboratories hold collections of old equipment, material collected in the field for research and education purposes or other kind of collections. Examples of these are the collections of the Department of Education, the Department of Physics and the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Technology. At the moment, we are registering this material and we collect and document by priority.

Our 'collection priority policy' includes the collection of older material, the most characteristic or rarest objects, and objects that laboratories cannot afford keeping because they have become obsolete and space is needed. We do not give priority to objects or collections that can still be stored in their original laboratories, unless they are in bad condition. Each time a laboratory or a department of the university needs to withdraw one or more objects, it has to inform the Museum directly or through the Direction of Economic Affairs of the University, which is responsible for the mobile property of the University. The head of the museum has to check the objects *in situ* and to decide whether they are of interest to the museum.

We also receive support from university staff, who provide information on extant material, and solid connections have been established with professors from different fields. The latter propose research projects to their students in order to support collection and documentation. Meanwhile, we also collect objects from the Patras area. The quality of the collections of the Science and Technology Museum will depend on the number of sciences represented as well as on the diversity of items in the realm of the history of each discipline. This will in turn determine the museological implementation plan for the permanent exhibition.

Plans to involve the academic community of Patras University include fieldwork in collaboration with different university departments, the organisation of seminars, courses on the history of science,

involvement of departmental staff and students in the organisation of museum activities, and collaboration with departments in developing products on science and technology based on new technologies. Plans for opening up the museum to society include stimulating the participation of as many local people as possible in the enrichment and documentation of the collections and the organisation of special events and exhibitions, particularly local specialists in various sciences or technology, school-teachers, and corporate bodies such as scientific associations, professional networks, institutions, and industries. In addition, the development of contacts with local bodies of education, the creation of a children's area in the museum, educational programs, and courses on the history of science and technology and contemporary developments, will help us to make the museum accessible to as many sections of society as possible (THEOLOGI-GOUTI 2001).

Concluding remarks

Describing the role of 'Pedagogy' and 'Heritage', in order to determine the 'Identity' of Patras University Science and Technology Museum, was a core goal since the beginning of its preparation. It was therefore decided that the museum would focus on the scientific and technological identity of the university, as well as on the town and region. In order to fulfil this task, the museum collects, documents and promotes not only the University's Scientific and Technological Heritage, but also the Scientific and Technological Heritage of the Area. To better use the knowledge and experience of the teaching and research personnel of the university, a Scientific Committee was created and collaboration with different departments is being developed. To make the Museum really accessible to both the academic and local society, new technologies of information and communication will be used in the presentation of the exhibitions, the educational programmes and other activities.

The Museum team, in collaboration with the Scientific Committee, is still working on different strategies of essentially involving the Academic

Community as well the local Community, the strategies of finding the funds for the different activities and better presenting the Identity of the Museum and strategies for better registering the Scientific and Technological Heritage of the University

and the area. We intend to continue working on this goal till the opening of the museum and after, as we understand that it is our duty to keep the identity of the Museum as much as possible compatible to the role Pedagogy and Heritage have to play in its life.

References

- THEOLOGI-GOUTI, P. 2000. A new museum for an ancient land: Patras University Science and Technology Museum. *Museum International* **206**: 25-32.
- THEOLOGI-GOUTI, P. 2001. The Patras University Science and Technology Museum: Fulfilling the university museum's dual role. In: M. KELLY (ed.) *Managing university museums: education and skills*, pp. 169-178. OECD, Paris.